



It's Perfectly Normal

Changing Bodies, Growing Up,
Sex, Gender, and Sexual Health

ROBIE H. HARRIS

illustrated by

MICHAEL EMBERLEY



CANDLEWICK PRESS

Strong Feelings

Sexual Desire

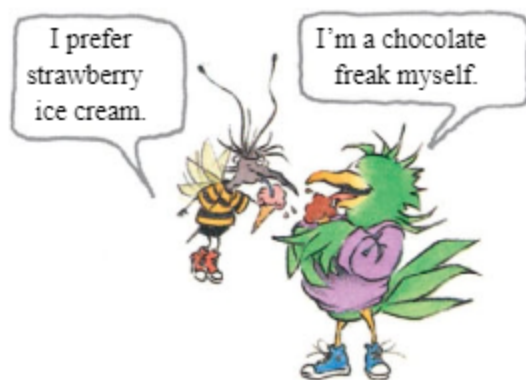


The dictionary tells us even more about sex. It says,

4: Sexual desire.

Sex is also the desire to be physically close to someone, as close as you can be.

Do you ever really want or crave something? That's desire, like when you really want someone to be your best friend or when you really want chocolate ice cream.



You don't know why you want these things. You don't even think about why you want them. These are simply feelings of wanting — of desire.

Sexual desire is different from these desires — different from just wanting chocolate ice cream, or wanting someone to be your best friend, or even wanting to snuggle up to your parent, a friend, a pet, or a stuffed animal.

Sexual desire means you feel attracted to someone in a very strong way . . . like being pulled by a magnet. You want to be as physically close to that person as you can be.

Even though you may think about that person a lot, sexual

desire is mostly the way you feel in your body about that person. Your body may feel excited or warm or quivery or tingly. And sometimes these feelings can be very strong.

For lots of kids, sexual desire can happen when one has happy, nervous, or exciting feelings about another person — feelings that you may even feel inside your body. Often it's hard to stop thinking about that person and you may even think you are in love with that person. That's called "having a crush" on someone. Having crushes is perfectly normal. Not having crushes is also perfectly normal.

Making Love

Sexual Intercourse



The dictionary tells us one more thing about sex. It says,

5: Sexual intercourse.

Sex can also mean sexual intercourse. Some people call sexual intercourse “having sex.”

Now we're getting to IT!

Getting to WHAT?

Oh, never mind. I wonder if you can find out even more about sex in the encyclopedia. . . .



Most often, sexual intercourse happens when two people feel very sexy and very attracted to each other and may also have very loving and romantic feelings about each other. These feelings often make them want to or decide to be very close to each other in a sexual way. People can have these feelings for people of a different gender, or for people of the same gender, or for all genders.

One kind of sexual intercourse happens when a person with a female body and a person with a male body are so close to each other that the penis goes inside the vagina, and the vagina stretches in a

way that fits around the penis. This kind of touching can make the whole body feel good — feel sexy. And when this kind of sexual intercourse happens, it is possible for a female body and a male body — once their reproductive organs have grown up — to make a baby.

This is what I thought IT was about.

I'd rather not think about IT.



Most people don't have sexual intercourse only when

they want a baby. Most often, people have sexual intercourse because it feels good. People have sexual intercourse well into old age.

When a couple has sexual intercourse and does not want to make a baby, there are healthy ways, called birth control, that can help keep them from making a baby or from passing on an infection to one another.

Sometimes, a couple does not plan ahead or decide whether or not to have sexual intercourse. Planning ahead is most often the most effective way to keep a pregnancy from beginning.

People also call sexual intercourse “making love” or “lovemaking” because it’s a way of expressing love. But sexual intercourse is only one way of expressing love.

Another kind of sexual intercourse happens when the sexual parts of two people who have female bodies touch or when the sexual parts of two people who have male bodies touch. This kind of touching can make the whole body feel good — feel sexy. Since male bodies have only sperm cells and no egg cells — and since female bodies have only egg



Who We Are

Straight, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender, Queer, Questioning, †



Straight, lesbian, gay, and bisexual are words that have to do with sex because sex is also about sexual desire — the sexual feelings we may have toward another person. The words sexual orientation are words that have to do with sexual attraction.

Being sexually attracted to another person has to do with those sexual feelings one has toward that person. People do not choose their sexual orientation. Often it takes time for kids and for adults to figure out their sexual orientation. And different people have different sexual orientations.

A person who is straight is someone who is sexually attracted to people of another gender — someone who is not the same gender as they are. Heterosexual is another name for a straight person. Heteros is the ancient Greek word for other.



In a straight relationship, two people of different genders — a male and a female — are sexually attracted to, and may have loving feelings for or fall in love with, or may have a sexual relationship with each other.

A person who is gay is someone who is sexually attracted to people of the same sex or gender. Homosexual is another name for a gay person. Homos is the ancient Greek word for same. Now most people use the word gay instead of the word homosexual. In a gay relationship, two people of the same gender — a male

Scientists do not completely understand or agree on why one person is straight, why another person is gay or lesbian, or why another person is bisexual. In fact, there may be more than one reason.

But most scientists believe that being lesbian, gay, straight, or bisexual is not something you choose — just as you cannot choose what skin color you were born with or the sex organs you were born with. They believe that a person is born with traits — with the biological makeup — and that those biological traits are what determine whether someone is a straight person, or a gay person, or a bisexual person.

Sometimes as kids are growing up, they become curious about other kids who are the same gender as they are or who are a different gender. They may even look at and even touch each other's bodies. This is a normal kind of exploring and does not necessarily have anything to do with whether someone is or will be straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Dreaming about or having a crush on a person of the same sex also does not necessarily mean that a person is or will

be straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.



Many people use the term LGBTQ+. These initials — L for lesbian, G for gay, B for bisexual, T for transgender, Q for queer or questioning, and + for plus — are ways of referring to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or who refer to themselves as queer or questioning, or who may use other words to refer to themselves. Queer is a word that some people use to describe their gender and/or their sexuality. In the past, some used the word queer as an insult. Now many people are proud to identify themselves as queer. Questioning is a word that is used when people may question who they are sexually attracted to — someone of the same sex or gender as themselves, someone of a different sex or gender from themselves,

or both, or neither. The word questioning is also used when kids or adults question the feelings they have about their own gender.

Pansexual describes those who are attracted to people of all genders, not just to males or females.

Asexual is a word that is used to describe people who feel that they are not sexually attracted to anyone of any gender. The word ace is often used as a shorter way of saying asexual.

Gender is another word to describe who you are as a person. Gender can also be about the thoughts and feelings you have about who you are as a person.

There are many other things to know and many other words that have to do with gender. What is most important is to use words that are respectful when talking about gender. Chances are you have heard some of, but maybe not all of, these words. That's because over time some words that are used to describe gender do change, even though other words to describe gender stay the same. And soon, there may be new words that we use to describe gender.



Cisgender is a word that has to do with gender. Cis is the Latin word for the phrase “on the same side.” A cisgender person is someone who feels or knows that the gender that was assigned to them at birth — female or male — was and still is their gender. The word cis is often used as a shorter way of saying the word cisgender. Cisgender people can be straight, or lesbian, or gay, or bisexual, or asexual.

Transgender is another word that has to do with gender.

Trans is the Latin word for across or the phrase on another side. A transgender person is someone whose gender identity is different from the gender that person was assigned at birth and who transitions from the gender assigned at birth to a different gender. Transgender people can be straight, or lesbian, or gay, or bisexual, or asexual.

This means that a person who was born with a male body, but feels, acts, and knows she is female and may ask to be

called a girl — or a person who was born with a female body, but feels, acts, and knows he is a male and may ask to be called a boy — is a transgender person. Some may feel this way all of the time and will feel this way throughout their lives. Others may feel this way for only a few months or a few years. And some may feel that sometimes they are one gender and other times they are a different gender.

Transgender people may change the way they dress or

Perfectly Normal Masturbation

During puberty, when the sex hormones cause kids' sex organs to become more active, many kids begin to have even more pleasurable and excited feelings about their own bodies than they have ever had before. They may also be more attracted to and interested in other people's bodies.

These feelings are often called sexual feelings or "feeling sexy." Even though they are hard to describe, they are normal feelings. They happen at different times and in different ways for different kids.

Kids, teenagers, and grown-ups too experience sexy feelings when they masturbate. Masturbation is touching or rubbing any of your body's sex organs for pleasure—because it feels good. One everyday term people young and old often use for masturbating is "playing with yourself."



Some people think that masturbation is wrong or harmful. And some religions call masturbation a sin. But masturbating cannot hurt you. And it does not result in pregnancy or in getting or passing on infections that are spread through sexual contact.

Many people masturbate. Many don't. Whether you

masturbate or not is your choice. Masturbating is perfectly normal.

When people masturbate, they usually rub their sex organs with their hands or with something soft, like a pillow.

Girls often rub their clitoris; boys often rub their penis. Both the clitoris and the penis are sensitive to touch.



Mas-tur-bat-ing.
I've heard
about that.



Just another
big word.
That's all it is.

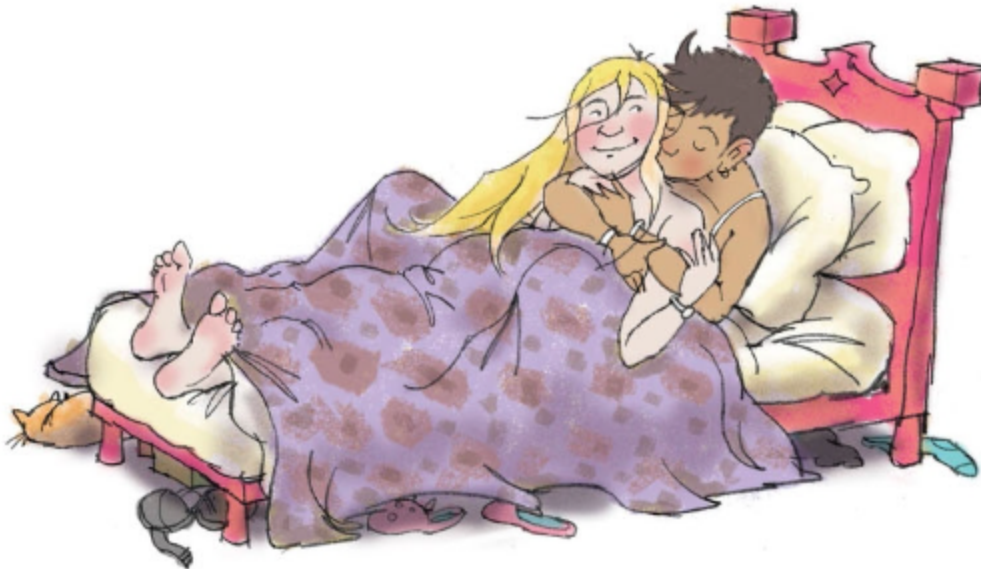




to sexual intercourse—at any time and for any reason.

Sexual intercourse usually begins with two people touching, caressing, kissing, and hugging each other.

After a bit, a person's vagina becomes moist and slippery, and the clitoris becomes hard. After a bit, a person's penis becomes erect, stiff, and larger. Sometimes a bit of clear fluid that may contain a few sperm comes out of the tip of the penis and makes it wet. This is usually when two people begin to feel excited about each other.



But in fact, there are different kinds of sexual intercourse — vaginal intercourse, oral intercourse, and anal intercourse.

When a person with a female body and a person with a male body are having vaginal intercourse, the erect penis goes into and inside the vagina, which stretches in a way that fits around the penis. The wetness from the vagina makes it easier for the penis to go into the vagina.



Vaginal intercourse is also called vaginal sex. As the two people move back and forth in rhythm, the movement of the penis inside the vagina soon feels very good. They may hug and kiss and touch each other

Normal or gross?

Do you think it's normal or do you still think it's gross to talk and think about bodies and sex?

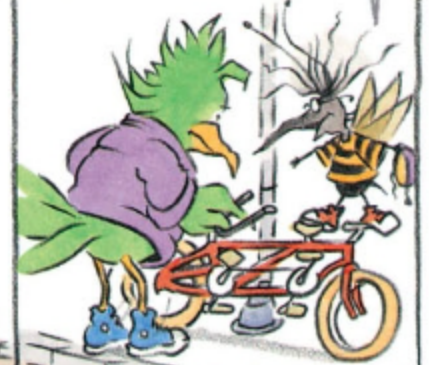
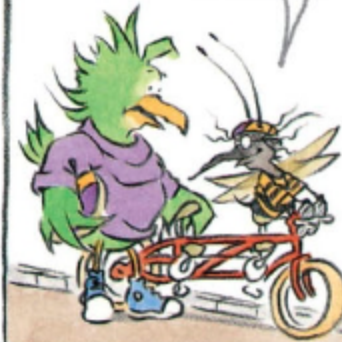


I think it's normal ... and gross that you asked me that.

You do?

Just kidding.

Get this! If there were no bodies and if there were no sex, there would be no human race!



Get this! Most kids think about bodies and sex ... and many kids talk and even joke about it.



I bet grown-ups do too.



Well, it's true that writers write about it and painters paint about it and scientists study about it and musicians sing about it.

And TV, and radio, and videos, and movies, all tell about it. And books, the Internet, magazines, ads, and commercials ...

Enough!



Thinking about bodies and sex and wanting to know about bodies and sex ...

and even talking about it ...

is perfectly normal!



We finally agreed on something!

We did?

